

**Finding the Promised Land:
The Evolution of “Paradise City”**

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Finding the Promised Land:
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“Finding the Promised Land: The Evolution of ‘Paradise City’” examines the development of Alisha Brophy’s television pilot, “Paradise City,” and the personal changes that have resulted from her involvement in this project.

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CHAPTER 1: THE ORIGINAL IDEA

In the beginning of 2007, I had already applied to grad school and was waiting for the schools' responses. I knew nothing about the People's Temple cult, Jim Jones or the mass suicide. All I had ever heard of was the pop culture line that jokingly warns, "Don't drink the Punch." One day before work, I was flipping through the television channels and caught the beginning of a documentary about Jonestown. Two hours later, I knew much more than the average American knows about Jonestown. However, I didn't feel that I knew enough. The idea that one man could convince almost 1,000 people to kill themselves could not be reasonably explained in two hours. Nor, could two hours of footage cover all the personal stories of the people that came to Jonestown for different reasons and from different backgrounds.

The documentary ended with actual footage taken from a helicopter's flyover of the land. I could see the pavilion, the cottages, and the more than 900 dead bodies that looked like litter left behind after a bad party. The death of so many people that had dedicated their lives to worthy social causes was overwhelming. I could not stop crying. As it was said after the Holocaust, "Never Forget," I felt that it was important for my generation to be aware of this event and the dangers of blind faith. That feeling was tied to the notion that every person's story was another human being that mattered. It was as if the knowledge of their existence made them less of a statistic.

I began asking around, and was shocked at how many people, like me, did not know who Jim Jones was or had never even heard of Jonestown. Also like me, the

reaction was usually, “Those people that drank the Kool-aid? Eventually, I left for graduate school, stopped asking people if they had heard of Jonestown, and began my path toward a screenwriting career.

During a mandated television-writing course, I was assigned the task of creating an original pilot. I had no idea what kind of show I would write. Relaxing in a coffee shop with a cohort, I put off worrying about my looming deadline, and instead started talking about Jonestown. My desire for people to know about that tragedy had never fully subsided. During the conversation, I realized that I had the perfect opportunity to explore my obsession with this particular cult by using it as the inspiration for my pilot. By writing an original show centered on a good-hearted group gone wrong, I would be able to satisfy my need to research Jonestown, be able to give voice to the personal stories of those that died, and inform others about the dangerous inner workings of cults.

My goal was to show how intelligent people could eventually become loyal to a madman. Many people swear that cult members must be uneducated or weak willed. In reality, many of Jim Jones’ constituents were well educated, and among his most loyal followers were lawyers, doctors, and teachers. Given the right circumstances, almost anyone can fall victim to a smooth talker that represents a seemingly loving and virtuous movement.

People always say that they would not have drunk the Kool-aid. Most outsiders can’t understand how over 900 Peoples Temple members could blindly follow what seems like an appalling final demand. For this reason, I am frustrated with the term “mass suicide.” I reluctantly use that particular terminology, because it is what most

people label the massacre at Jonestown. Unbeknownst to most however, almost a third of those that perished were children, unable to choose whether to live or die. Adults also were not given a choice. Armed guards encircled the congregation, and anyone caught trying to flee would be shot. So, it was only a small number of loyalists that willfully chose death. The rest were either blatantly murdered or murdered through coercion. It was truly a “mass murder” not a “mass suicide.” A television series could reveal the complex process that leads to such a deadly tragedy.

CHAPTER 2: INITIAL HURDLES

My coffee shop procrastination turned into a fervent jotting down of ideas and storylines. I wanted to create a world that mimicked many of the Jonestown attributes so that I could be consistent with the reasons behind the mass suicide.

However, I quickly discovered a problem with my plan. The obvious focus would be on a male preacher with a rock-star like following. This would be in contrast to my numerous projects preceding this pilot. I knew that my strengths were writing strong female characters. Plus, he could not be my protagonist, since this maniacal man would eventually lead many to their death. He needed a strong female enemy and she could be my protagonist. I decided that he needed a rebellious daughter. The true power struggle of the story would always be between a father and his daughter.

My next concern was the time period that would best suit the story. I instantly imagined it all playing out in the early 1970s. Not only would it be historically consistent, but it would also create a much more insulated world for the family. For example, the children would not have access to the Internet, and the dreaded writers' cell-phone dilemma would be a non-issue. However, given my age, I felt that I would not be able to accurately represent the time period. I talked to my professor about my concerns, and he thought that it was more important to be loyal to the story than to choose a later era for my own writing comfort. He cited the show *Mad Men* that is written by a staff that were not alive in the 1950s, and he reminded me that all the historical information that I would need could be found on the Internet.

Another concern was how to portray the preacher. I wanted to illustrate a man who began his congregation with good intentions, and was able to give back to the community. However, he would also need to be a man whose addiction to power would corrode the beneficial elements of his movement. The problem lay in the knowledge that a pilot episode must be a stand-alone writing sample. Any large character arc would be over an entire season. So, I was not sure if I should start the episode early in the preacher's career when he is still charming or, start the episode later in his career when his maniacal ways make for interesting conflict. I decided that the best way to show the change would be to show the preacher as a charming, manipulative man that is still doing charitable acts, but hinting towards future maniacal possibilities. One way to do this was to open the episode on the carnage of a mass suicide, and then immediately jump back in time to a happier, peaceful period in the cult's history.

Another decision that had to be made was the location in which the story would take place. This was made more difficult, because the main storyline culminates in a mass exodus. Therefore, I had two important geographical decisions to make. Jim Jones flew his people to South America for their new settlement, but I felt that was too complicated and expensive for my fictional movement. Plus, I wanted outsiders to keep progressively stronger pressure on the cult. That would be nearly impossible if they were as insulated by the distance and space another continent would allow. However, it was important to me that they flee to another country where they would feel that they were escaping American laws. So, I had to choose between Canada and Mexico. Since I knew that I wanted the preacher's daughter to attend public school, and for this to be a major

conflict in her relationship with her father, I combined the storyline with the historic integration problems of Texas. This made Mexico the perfect choice for the setting of their migration.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH

I knew that I wanted my pilot to feel authentic, both factually and with the details of the cult's operations. My research centered around two topics: the 1970s and Jonestown.

I first thought that I would set my script during 1974, and even wrote my original Pilot Bible with 1974 in mind. However, I discovered that many of the events that I wanted to reference had occurred around 1971. For instance, I have a minor character who makes fun of the cult, claiming they are like Charles Manson's "family." 1971 was the year that many of the trials for the Manson-ordered deaths were held. Also, 1971 was an important year in the issue of race relations, and bussing in order to desegregate schools. George Wallace was busy trying to stop this process and was successful in Austin, TX. The issue of race is such a large part of what starts the fictional cult's mass exodus that I wanted to have it occurring in a year that was as affected by difficult race relations. Another factor having to do with the choice of year was the first release of a Carly Simon record. Her debut album, *Carly Simon*, was released in March of 1971. From the beginning I knew that I wanted Simon's music to be linked to the plot, so timing the story around her album was a necessity.

Once a timeline was established, the research into the inner workings of Jonestown began. I read many autobiographies of ex cult-members, a collection of ephemera from The People's Temple, and a 600-page tome about Jim Jones that was

written by a journalist who was shot during the siege upon escaping members, hours before the infamous mass suicide.

One of the autobiographies that I read was *Seductive Poison* by Deborah Layton. She had been in Jim Jones' inner circle, and was one of his mistresses. She had been entrusted with many of Jones' secrets. These responsibilities included hiding money in offshore accounts, and typing fake letters threatening Jones' life so that he could play the role of victim. She went as far as moving to Jonestown with her elderly mother before she decided to leave the cult. This decision saved her from the deadly fate of the other Jonestown settlers. Her mother, however, was not a part of the escape, and perished during the suicide. The autobiography explained that it was this woman's brother, Larry Layton, who pretended to be a defector in order to exterminate the people trying to leave the settlement. Her knowledge of the church's inner workings and her personal interactions with Jim Jones made her autobiography a necessity in my understanding of the Peoples Temple.

I also read *Dear People: Remembering Jonestown*, edited by Denice Stephenson. This book, from the Collection at the California Historical Society, is full of selections from the Peoples Temple Collection. This collection gave me access to letters, sermon transcripts, journal entries, and other ephemera associated with the church. I found this especially helpful, because the accounts were not filtered through a victim's point of view. It gave me material that I could study, learn from, and use to draw my own conclusions.

I also read many websites dedicated to the topic of Jonestown. One such site is run by a man who lives a couple miles outside of the city where Jim Jones grew up. This man actually sells, on the website, “grape Flavor-aid” bought from a store in Jones’ hometown. Fortunately, there are less exploitive websites that focus more on compiling information. For instance, The Jonestown Institute has compiled hundreds of transcripts from Jim Jones’ sermons. I found these transcripts extremely helpful while writing my fictional preacher’s dialogue. Just as it is difficult for a preacher to hold the attention of his constituents when they have spent hours sitting on a hard pew in the summer heat, it is also difficult for my character to hold the viewer’s attention for a monologue. So, I took cues from the Jones’ sermons, and tried to give my character a similar flair when preaching. Even more interesting than the transcripts, are the sound clips from the actual final sermon that Jim Jones gave as he insisted that his followers drink the poison. Jim Jones was obsessed with recording his sermons, and replaying them over the outdoor loudspeakers of Jonestown. This obsession resulted in recorded evidence of his last manipulative words for the world to now study.

The most helpful item I found was *Raven: The Untold Story of the Rev. Jim Jones and His People*, by Tim Reiterman. This book begins with Jones’ childhood, and ends with the follow-up on the few key People’s Temple members who survived. The 600 pages in between delve deep into Jim Jones’ psyche and every detailed step along his rise to power. The book also tells dozens of stories of how followers became a part of this movement. The author was a journalist for a major newspaper, and had been invited to join American Congressman Leo Ryan along with family members of Jonestown settlers

on the flight to Guyana to document the Jonestown conditions, and offer a safe escape for those who wanted to leave. He was one of only a few outsiders that survived that trip, but five others did not, including the Congressman, a defector, and three journalists. He was offered immediate book deals upon returning to the States, but he waited years before publishing *Raven* so that it could be thoroughly researched. I found this book the most helpful, because it seemed that the author's motives were the most aligned with my own: a desire to understand the psyche of Jim Jones, to follow how he gained his power, and to give voice to his victims.

CHAPTER 4: CHARACTERS

Other writers tend to base their characters on people that they know. I can see the benefit in this technique, because the characters have their own voice. It is as if you can “hear” how the real person would talk or react. However, I almost never employ this writer’s trick. It feels unnatural to me. I instead realized that Jim Jones’ family gave me amazing true-life characters to use as templates for my own story.

Marceline, the wife of Jim Jones, was a woman that originally fell in love with Jones because of his good intentions. By the end, however, she knew of the infidelity; she knew of his unhealthy mind; and she had an idea what he would do if he lost his power. She would tell her confidantes that she thought of him more as a sick child than a powerful husband. She also would subtly try to undermine some of his crazier schemes, and talk him down when he would become riled with thoughts of violence and suicide. This was the kind of woman that I wanted in the role of the preacher’s wife. My fictional preacher’s wife however, has a more naïve back-story, and a stronger desire to be on the arm of an influential man.

Jim Jones expected his son, Stephen, to be his “heir apparent.” But even as a child, Stephen was too rebellious. As a teen, Stephen was part of Jones’ violent security team, and was a co-conspirator in many of his father’s scams and frauds. However, he tended to do just enough work to get by without ever buying into the vision that his father saw for the movement. By the time of the mass suicide, Stephen was trying to figure out how to execute a coup. He was never able to follow through with his plans, because the

mass suicide brought it all to an end. However, Stephen survived the final ordeal by blatantly refusing two important orders from his father on that fateful day. First, he refused to go into town in order to kill the cult's enemies. Secondly, he refused to return to Jonestown even though his dad insisted that it was an emergency. His defiance kept him alive.

Stephen, as a child, became the template for the fictional preacher's son, John. In "Paradise City," John is the heir apparent, but is too unruly and impulsive to grow into any kind of a leader. He is too busy playing in dirt and pulling girl's pigtails to sit through his father's sermons or study the church's beliefs.

Stephen as a teenager also gave me a loose idea of how I wanted the fictional preacher's daughter, Nevada, to act. She is willing to go along with the rules of the cult in order to keep the peace, but she is internally questioning the system. Also, she has the proximity, the intelligence, and the inner strength that makes her Jeremiah James' biggest threat.

Jim Jones' was a manipulative boy. He was obsessed with controlling his friends, preaching out of his backyard to neighborhood kids, and was showing early signs of violent tendencies. For instance, he once shot at a childhood friend who denied Jones' request to stay for an after-dinner dessert. This behavior served as the perfect model for my character, Mary. Mary is the middle child, and the one who has the most in common with her father. She wants power and will use religion and manipulation to gain it. She thinks of her father as a hero, and wants more than anything, to follow in his footsteps.

She is too young to understand however, that because she is a girl, she will never be offered that role.

Not only were Jim Jones' family members excellent character models, so were the forces against Jim Jones. For instance, many defectors and family members who wanted to pull their kin away from Jones' grip, joined forces, and became the "Concerned Relatives Group." This group kept constant political pressure on the Peoples Temple. They also employed journalists to keep the cult's activities in the public eye. It was this group that convinced Congressman Leo Ryan to fly to Jonestown in order to help extricate those that wanted to defect. Jones saw this group as his biggest enemy. I used the Concerned Relatives as the blueprint for my fictional organization, the "Truth Seekers." I wanted one individual to represent this group. So I created Sue, a woman who is just as dedicated to saving her sister from the cult, as Reverend James is dedicated to not losing a single member.

Jeremiah James is a close portrayal of Jim Jones. For instance, both are charming, intelligent, and manipulative. Both have the same obsessive fear of losing their power. Both see defiance as the worst insult. In fact, when Congressman Ryan called for defectors to leave the settlement, less than twenty of the nearly thousand settlers came forward. This should have been a reminder to Jones of his strong grasp over his congregation. However, ex-members have since stated that it did not matter if it had been one or hundreds that asked to leave. *Any* defection would have had the same negative affect on Jones. Just one person choosing to leave that lifestyle was enough for

Jones to feel as though he failed. This is the same paranoia that I wanted to give Jeremiah James.

Although Jim Jones and the fictional Jeremiah James are similar, there are some notable differences. Jim Jones moved away from religion and began preaching Marxism, and insisting that there is no God. Jones would actually stomp on bibles while at the pulpit. He insisted that everyone is his or her own God, and that Communism is the answer. I decided that this would be too confusing for my television series. In addition, I liked the idea of my preacher exploiting religion for his own goals. Hence, in order to support his façade of authority, Jeremiah James often uses bible quotes to prove his points, and reminds his congregation that he is closer to God.

Although my fictional preacher still relies on God as a staple in his sermons, I did mimic aspects of Jim Jones' Communist slant. For instance, Reverend James has his followers tithe their homes that he then converts into communal living spaces. He also uses the idea of "Communalism" as an excuse to force his followers to sell their belongings for the church's monetary gain. However, this fictional preacher supports his views with Christianity, citing scripture that aligns Jesus' teachings with James' beliefs.

CHAPTER 5: REVISIONS AND SCRIPT LESSONS

This script has gone through five drafts, each with major revisions to the original story. Fortunately, each draft felt stronger. More importantly, the revisions also reiterated larger writing lessons.

For instance, the original draft contained a scene that had Nevada sitting alone on a bus, staring out the window. My initial reasoning was to show her loneliness. However, my professor immediately flagged all the problems with this theory. First, unlike prose, the only way to give words to a character's internal feelings is through dialogue. I needed to place a person next to Nevada on the bus so that she has someone with whom she can converse. Also, there is nothing visually interesting about a teen staring out of a window. I was still able to show her loneliness by having her unable to relate to the friend. My initial goal of showing her isolation was achieved while making the scene more visually interesting, and giving Nevada a way of expressing her inner feelings.

The same lesson was quickly applied to other moments in the script. For instance, originally while Nevada was alone, in the make-up room of the television studio, she attempted to put makeup on herself. But, the scene was immediately stronger when I placed a makeup artist in the room.

Another major revision, was adding the racial element to the A storyline. Originally, both Caitlyn and Brian were Caucasian. Caitlyn's age was the only conflict in the situation. Once I changed Brian's ethnicity to African-American, however, the story

instantly strengthened. Now, the A story is more directly tied to the time period, and the church can have more pressure from a racist society that does not want interracial marriages. It seemed like such a small change, one character's ethnicity, yet it gave the main storyline a complete overhaul. It was also a good reiteration of the lesson that a story's time period must be earned. Setting the story in 1971 was not being fully utilized until the era's difficult race relations impacted the episode's course.

A major change from earlier drafts was the removal of the most extreme scenes. An earlier draft had Jeremiah feeding wine to his Protection Crew, and then falsely claiming that it had been laced with poison. Jeremiah claimed that it was a loyalty test. I loved the scene, but it was too extreme for the location of Jeremiah in his character arc. The pilot episode needs to portray a man who is eventually capable of such an act, but is not yet behaving this extremely. It is a fine line between a writer's best material in a pilot episode and still being loyal to the early stages of a future character arc. The fake poisoning had to be removed with the possibility of inserting it into an episode towards the end of the season.

Another instance of having to remove the most extreme behaviors was the deletion of a scene in which a defector is violently beaten as punishment for her desertion. The beating was, in many ways, too expected. I had to push the script, and figure out what would be more insidious and manipulative than the easy option of a beating. Having a defector seduced into returning to the cult was a more powerful option. It would allow the audience to continue to fear for her safety. It would also showcase Jeremiah's charm if the audience could see how he can manipulate an ex-

member to return to his control without any overt threats. This is a perfect example of Hitchcock's theory that a gun raises more tension than a gunshot. If the defector is beaten, the tension has been released from the scene. But, if I can keep the audience worried about her safety, then I can extend the suspense.

The scene order has also been rearranged to strengthen the story. Originally, I had an early scene showing Caitlyn and Brian changing the date on Caitlyn's birth certificate. They later ask Jeremiah to marry them. He agrees, and the final scene of the storyline is the wedding. However, when I removed the birth certificate scene and inserted it after Jeremiah agrees to marry them, I then have instantly raised the tension and created a strong act break.

Another important change was how characters reacted to the idea of Nevada going to public school. In the original version, it is Jeremiah who refuses to let Nevada go. Nevada then contacts Child Protective Services so that Jeremiah is forced to let her enroll. That version did not feel authentic. It was too rushed, too implausible, and was the expected reaction from Jeremiah. In the next version, I inverted Jeremiah's response. I had him agree to let Nevada go to school, because he knew that he could make an example out of her later in the episode. However, the problem with this was that Nevada decided that she did not want to continue going to school. This resolved the B storyline by Act II, and dissipated the friction between Nevada and her father. So, the final draft had Jeremiah allowing Nevada to go to school with the expectation that his daughter will hate the experience. Instead, Nevada decides that she wants to stay in public school. This extends the conflict between the two main characters, and forces Nevada to make a

decision in Act IV. The rebellion of his oldest child is also another pressure that convinces him a mass exodus is necessary in order to protect his power.

Another challenging aspect was finding ways to make characters feel multi-faceted without letting them come across as inconsistent. One choice I made was to have Nevada know how to smoke. I knew that the audience would expect such a sheltered girl to have never touched a cigarette, but I wanted to give her a back-story that is not totally predictable. I explain her smoking skills as something that she learned from her older love interest. A second example was having Nevada casually whisper a threat in a bully's ear. However, this was later deleted, because it felt uncharacteristic. Nevada comes across as too good-hearted to switch into a threatening character. The optimal character is one that feels fleshed out, but can still surprise the audience. Hopefully, this ideal is met with the final version of Nevada.

Though every draft's changes affected characters, storylines, pace, and dialogue, there were some elements that remained the same. For instance, every draft stayed focused on Jeremiah and Nevada, and the effect their choices had on the other. Also, every draft kept the basic structure of a flash-forward teaser beginning with the remnants of a mass suicide in a Mexican field, and ending on an image of the same field. Another element that stayed consistent was the Sunshine character that introduces Nevada to Carly Simon's music. Teenagers take their music more seriously than any other age group, and I felt that Simon's role as female empowerment through song could affect Nevada in a way that just making friends could not. It is the combination of acceptance

and connection to music that pulls Nevada further away from her father and the other church members.

CHAPTER 6: PERSONAL HISTORY

My mother and father decided to raise me without a specific religion and hoped that as an adult, I would pick a belief system that worked for me. My mother is Catholic, and believes in ghosts and Heaven. My father is Quaker, and believes in war protests and sing-alongs. But, it has not always been this way. Growing up, my mother had stopped attending church, and my father would try out new religions monthly. I have memories of being dragged along on many of these faith searches. As a child, I secretly colored in the Jehovah's Witnesses bibles, because they were black & white and needed color. I remember being carried around by sweet-smelling Buddhist monks who were travelling across the country. And, I can recall my fear as I was brought to a revival where people were fainting and speaking in tongues.

Eventually my father stopped searching, and I was able to continue my childhood absent of any religious influence. Looking back it now seems odd to me that my parents have settled back into such strong religious beliefs. Because of a non-pet rental agreement, my two cats had to stay with my mom for a year. She secretly took them to church with her on "Pet Sunday," and had both cats blessed so that they will go to Heaven. My mom knew that I would never agree to this blessing, so she waited until their souls were saved before telling me about it. My father also has become fervent in his religious beliefs. He married an ex-Episcopalian nun and together they converted to Quakerism. I have found that midnight is the only time that I can call to talk to my father because his days and evenings are filled with Quaker House meetings, Quaker singing

group, Quaker war protests outside the New York State Capitol building, and Quaker road trips to larger protests. My father's house is covered in bibles, and signs quoting Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi.

I was originally worried about writing a story set inside a cult, because I had never experienced any kind of loyalty to a religion. Even as a child, I questioned the very concept of a higher power, and never understood my friends' certainty in God. So, the idea of writing a television pilot that dealt with loyalty and religion was intimidating. I quickly found that the cult was easy to portray after enough research. I realized that I had more experience with the relationship between the fictional preacher and his daughter than I initially anticipated.

My father has always been a strong personality. But, in his thirties he developed a strain of muscular dystrophy that slowly robbed him of his able body. He is now in an electric wheelchair that he steers with his chin. Though his body changed, his personality did not. He had to find ways of keeping control solely with his words. Without the use of his hands or legs, he had to constantly focus on convincing people around him into doing even the simplest task that he, pre-disease, would have done himself. His intelligence always kept him one step ahead of whomever he was manipulating.

For instance, one day I wanted to borrow his truck. He told me I could, as long as I cleaned out the truck bed and put everything in the garage. He stayed at my side telling me where to put each item. But, there was a catch. Most of these items needed to go where another garage item was already sitting. This meant that I had to pull piles of boxes out of the garage. These things, my father determined, needed to go into our barn.

He stayed at my side as I put these items away. True to form, each object needed to go where something else was already sitting. So, he talked me through the reorganizing of the barn. The final item to be moved was a broken sickle. He had me lean it against a table saw. My father said, “Bob asked if he can use that saw this weekend. I’ll have him fix the sickle before he can get to the saw.” By the time I was done with the project, my father had a clean truck bed, garage, barn, and soon-to-be fixed sickle. I was too tired to take the truck anywhere.

Looking back, I can recognize my father’s techniques as survival tactics, but as a teen I just saw him as controlling. Rebelling against such a figure is nearly impossible. My father already had the disease by the time I was born so I never knew my father as an able-bodied man. Older family members would cater to his needs because they saw how he had changed. But to me, he was just my dad, and therefore, he was often the enemy. However, just as he used his words to accomplish tasks, he was also able to them to keep me in line. There was no spanking, taking away of toys, or other physical tactics. My father had to command loyalty and obedience through speech. He was incredibly successful.

Though my father was no maniacal cult leader, I realize that he has given me a strong template for the relationship between the fictional Reverend James and Nevada. There is more power in being able to convince people to follow you than bullying them into obeying. It also strengthens Nevada’s dilemma, because she will eventually have to rebel against the hardest type of personality and familial role to defy—that of her leader and her father.

CHAPTER 7: FUTURE PROJECTS

Television writing was a required course for my Screenwriting program, and to say the least, I was not looking forward to the class. I had never had a desire to write for television. Within the first couple weeks, however, I had fallen in love with the new format. Although the scenes and Acts still needed to have a cause and effect, there was more of a world to explore. Film writing feels like a narrow straight line with just enough room for a subplot or two. Each scene acts like a domino that causes the next one to happen. Television writing still has scene dominoes, but they are set up in a wider world. I feel like it allows me to have a larger peripheral vision as I follow along my main storyline.

Working on this script also showed me that television writing allows for a deeper exploration of characters. Feature scripts have character arcs that must be accomplished in two hours. Television protagonists, however, can evolve over an entire season. This extra screen time gives the writer room to showcase more of the character's facets. Furthermore, this increase in character dimension is not limited to the protagonist. Supporting characters are also able to have lives outside of the protagonist's storyline. This feels more natural than creating minor characters and subplots, solely for the purpose of affecting the main plot near the Act II break.

Every semester I would start a new project with a high concept pitch and a male protagonist. However, I was notorious for slipping into a character piece with a female lead around the eighth week of class. Over the past two years, I have learned to accept

my strengths and weaknesses in regards to my writing. This project is the culmination of utilizing my strengths, and accentuating my capabilities. “Paradise City” simultaneously focuses on character, strong females, and explores a multitude of storylines. It has cemented my belief that many of my future projects will be television-based.

APPENDIX A: PILOT PITCH (FIRST DRAFT)

“Paradise City” Pitch

“Six Feet Under” finds God.

Society seems shocked when televangelists hire male hookers, right-wing radio hosts pop pills, and GOP candidates fall in love with little boys. Even though we all know that our idols are fallible, we still insist on their perfection and buy into their vision. It is important, as a culture, to not worship a fellow man. As the bumper sticker says, Power Corrupts, Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely.” And the fallout of this environment is tragedy for the leader, the family, the followers, and those that loved them.

Too often, people rely on the line “Don’t Drink the Punch” for comedy, but don’t take the time to consider what persuades a person to actually take that sip.

Boys are confusing. Girls are petty. Hormones complicate everything. Imagine spending your days in the hell that is public school, while spending your nights in the perplexity that is your family’s cult. Nevada James can’t escape the awkwardness of being a sophomore misfit, nor can

she escape the increasingly militaristic regime that is her home. A cold mother, a power-hungry father, and the cult members that worship him surround Nevada.

Temple's Gate is a community of 500 that believes in Jackson James' message of hope, equality, and peace. The more debauchery, violence, and discrimination that they see in the world, the more they feel that they are part of a necessary movement. They have no idea the inner demons that their leader struggles with and so it is easy for them to buy into his perfection. They give their money, resolve, and eventually, their lives, to further his deluded plans.

"Paradise City" begins with a mass suicide. It is over five seasons of one long flashback that the audience gets to know the characters and eventually find out who died in that event and who escaped. The character that would be of most concern is...

Nevada James is 15, perceptive, solitary, and dealing with hormones. She is smart, but sheltered. She has always looked up to her father, both because she is a "daddy's girl" but also due to the cult's adulation of him. She is constantly at war with her mother, almost as if they compete for the father's attention.

Nevada is starting to do the typical teenage existential questioning. But, in a climate of strict ideological views and rules, her normalness is seen as a threat to the cult. Nevada is in the process of becoming her own person but that process is in direct conflict with her parents, her religion, and her community.

The state got involved and forced her parents to enroll her in public school. She is now an outcast around the normal kids for being weird and an outcast around the indoctrinated cult kids for entering the outside world. Although, she is an outcast, both factions find her novel, wanting to learn more about the others from her.

Her experience with the outside world made her more questioning and now she can't follow blindly anymore.

Jackson James, 42, is the father of five children, the oldest being Nevada. Jackson is similar to the infamous Jim Jones. He had noble, grand plans when he first started preaching. But, the power, the pills and alcohol, and his deteriorating mental condition have led to an unstable, militaristic, and dangerous individual.

After getting Nevada out of public school, he realizes that his control is too threatened by the outside world, so he begins plans to move his followers to a much more desolate area. He is convinced that this new “Paradise City” is the only way to create a perfect utopia.

Jackson slowly begins to think of himself as a fraud. His paranoia affects all aspects of his life, while he tries to hide his demons from his family and followers. His positive public image is his greatest obsession.

Jackson loves Nevada, but her rebelliousness is threatening his power and image. So, she is in many ways, his biggest enemy.

APPENDIX B: ORIGINAL LOGLINE (FIRST DRAFT)

Definite:

A Story: Nevada is forced to go to public school

B Story: Jeremiah decides to create a Utopia out of the government's reach

Options:

C Story: Meredith gets married (turns out she lied about her age, which gives the govt. an excuse to go after Jeremiah

D Story: Jeremiah begins to be blackmailed by an ex-member that he was sleeping with

E Story: Nevada develops a crush on a cult guy and a public school guy

F Story: Jeremiah's right hand man sets in motion an attempted coup.

G Story: A group of ex-members and family members launch a media war against the group.

APPENDIX C: PILOT OUTLINE (FIRST DRAFT)

(Please note change in date: April 1971)

Teaser:

Remnants of mass suicide. Thirty-plus dead bodies lying in a field around a 100ft tall, blazing red, Tupelo Gum tree. Jeremiah wanders between the bodies, looking lost. He carries a bowl of water.

TITLE CARD: "Earlier"

Sam carries a bowl of water up the church's main aisle to Jeremiah. The pews that he passes hold many of the people that were seen dead around the tree. Jeremiah begins to sprinkle the water on a woman kneeling at his feet. He then dumps the entire bowl over her head and casts out the demons. He shows off his "clairvoyance" by stating her social security number. He preaches of society's racist and capitalistic demons. All the members chant in unison except Nevada. Nevada is busy staring at the hands of the teenage boy next to her. He catches her eye and she shyly smiles. He puts his arm around the girl next to him.

Act I:

The members take buses to the news station. They pass a public school where Nevada watches the high school students filing out. The students all smile, flirt, and seem to connect to one another. The bus breaks down. The members pray to photos of Jeremiah hoping for a miracle while the driver works under the hood. Nevada sits on the curb and studies the teenage students as they pass by. One boy tries to impress his friends by asking Nevada smartass questions about “cults.” The bus starts running again. The bus arrives at the station so that they can cheer on Jeremiah as he enters the building for a publicity interview. Melinda, a family member of one of his followers, accosts Jeremiah. She makes a scene about him not allowing her sister to come home.

Jeremiah goes on air to complain about how his first amendment right of freedom of religion is being infringed on by the government. The government won’t allow his church to be tax-exempt. In 1970 the US Supreme Court rules that houses of worship can be exempt from property taxes if such groups are “beneficial and stabilizing influences in community life.” He preaches about all the wonderful things that the church is doing and the unfairness of the IRS. Another guest is a local politician. During the break Jeremiah sweet-talks the politician, promising his members voting support in the upcoming election. The politician

applauds Jeremiah's work once they are back on air and supports his fight for tax-exemption.

Nevada is left to wait in the greenroom. She wanders into the makeup room. No one is around so she starts trying on the makeup. She hears footsteps and tries to wipe it all off but there is remnants of lipstick and eye shadow. Her father enters and flips out that she is trying to be "Society's whore."

Meredith and her fiancé forge a birth certificate.

Brenda, home with the kids, sneaks in her soap opera. She is interrupted by Jackie who begs Brenda for help. She complains that Jeremiah made her liquidate her home but that she needs it back because her mother had a stroke and she needs to have a place to live with her to take care of her. Jackie doesn't want Jeremiah to know that she talked to Brenda. She figures Brenda might be able to secretly work the paperwork for her to have her house back. Brenda insists that it would be okay to talk to Jeremiah about it.

The James family sits around the dinner table. Nevada states that she wants to go to public school. Jeremiah insists that she would be in danger

there and that she is too important to the church to be away 5 days a week. Brenda says that it might give Nevada a way to spread their church's word to the teenage sinners. Jeremiah refuses. Jeremiah slips away and pops pills. While washing dishes, Brenda brings up Jackie's request for her house. Jeremiah begins questioning Jackie's loyalty. Brenda realizes that it was a mistake to ask, Jackie is now in jeopardy.

Nevada secretly calls Social Services on herself.

The next morning a representative from the government arrives and insists that Nevada be enrolled in public school.

Act II:

Nevada enters the public school and is shocked at the reality of it all. She sees segregation, sexuality, and cruelty. She has to introduce herself in homeroom. She tries to come across normal but the boy that confronted her outside her church bus is in the class. He makes fun of her "cult" and the whole class jumps in asking about goat blood and offering up virgins.

Brenda tries to avoid Jackie, who wants to know if Brenda has taken care of the house paperwork.

Nevada meets Sunshine, a sweet hippie, during biology class... Nevada is learning about evolution—she is shocked and confused. Sunshine takes her under her wing. Sunshine finds Nevada fascinating because she has never listened to Carly Simon or kissed a boy. She plans on introducing her to the world.

Jeremiah meets with his inner circle to discuss the threat of Melinda and to stage the next clairvoyance. One of the followers worries about the impact of being caught faking the healings/clairvoyance. Jeremiah explains that the ends justify the means. Sam presents findings of items out of members' garbage cans. Jeremiah mentions how they need to not break any laws because he is convinced that the government is out to stop him.

During Sunday's worship, Jeremiah preaches about the dangers of technology. Afterwards, he hides away to watch a football game. He has to cut his viewing short because he has a meeting with Meredith and her fiancé. They ask him to officiate their marriage and show the forged document. He agrees, thinking that she is of age to marry.

Nevada lies to her parents and claims to be going to help out at the soup kitchen that the church runs. Instead, she goes to a party with Sunshine where she tries drugs, makes out with a boy, and passes out—missing curfew.

Melinda hosts a meeting of ex-members and estranged family members. They discuss the bad side of the church and what they can do about it. They call themselves the “Truth Seekers”.

Nevada wakes up and freaks out. She can’t believe that she was a part of the debauchery and she feels guilty. She goes straight home and confesses. It seems that Jeremiah is fine with it and commends her on her ability to see her wrongs. She thinks the situation is over. She tells him that she doesn’t want to go to public school anymore.

Jeremiah is secretly furious with Nevada. During worship he takes her on stage and embarrasses her, trying to rid her of demons. He uses her as an example of how everyone is in danger from the outside world if his own daughter could fall. (He calls her the “whore of Babylon”)

Act III:

Sunshine finds the church's commune/apartments and confronts Nevada on her sudden absence. Nevada is cruel to Sunshine, blaming her for the sins of the world. Sunshine, hurt, leaves behind a gift: a Carly Simon record.

Jeremiah officiates Meredith's wedding.

Jeremiah organizes a "Protection Crew" headed by Sam, whose job it is to follow members of the Truth Seekers and do other subversive things to protect the church.

Brenda is cornered by Jackie and admits that she told Jeremiah about Jackie's house request. Jackie, fearful for her safety, leaves the church. Jeremiah freaks out. Jackie meets with the Truth Seekers and gives information like the names of members and details of the organization for them to research. Meredith's full name is on this list.

Sam takes his job as Protection Crew leader too seriously. Now he has too much power and he is spying on many of the current members too.

Jeremiah can't fall asleep. Brenda tries to comfort him. He takes sleeping pills and voices his conspiracy theories. He talks of all the assassinations

of the good men and feels he is next. He hears soft music coming from Nevada's room. It is the voice of Carly Simon singing:

*Today I was gonna hold out my hand,
Reach up for that light and let it shine.
Today I have no light to guide me
Feelin' like the one they left behind,
So I called you up,
You left your love and took me away,
Though I've left you many times before-
You are just a sinner.*

Jeremiah doesn't confront Nevada but it is obvious he feels he is losing her to the outside world.

Jeremiah sees a news broadcast where Melinda from Truth Seekers is blasting the church and asking the police to investigate the underage marriage.

The next morning Jeremiah takes an overdose of pills. He attempts his sermon but slurs and passes out. He blames it on stress from the Truth Seekers attack and from demons trying to take over all of them.

When he awakes, he claims to have had a vision. A crimson red tree that will mark the land where they will create a Utopia that keeps them safe from the outside world. Tithing will now be mandatory to pay for the massive project.

Act IV:

Jackie is attacked and left beaten by masked assailants.

Nevada waits after school for Sunshine and apologizes. Sunshine and Nevada make plans to sneak out for a Carly Simon concert.

Jeremiah announces to the family that they are moving immediately to a new land and building "Paradise City" from the ground up. Nevada doesn't want to go but she can't tell her family about her new friend and the concert she has her heart set on.

Jeremiah takes his frustrations out on Nevada. He makes her burn all items from the outside world...schoolbooks, etc. But she doesn't know that he knows about the record.

Brenda finds out about what happened to Jackie. She feels guilty because she assumes that People's Peace is behind it and that it's her fault for starting Jackie's fallout with Jeremiah.

Jeremiah sneaks into Nevada's room and breaks the hidden Carly Simon record.

Jeremiah wanders with his inner circle until he comes across the Tupelo Gum tree. He rips pages out of a bible and litters them all around, "claiming the land." This is intercut with Nevada and Sunny at a Carly Simon concert, her song "Another Door" playing over both scenes these lyrics:

Some destination,

A footstep in the sand

Some indication,

A truth to understand.

I'm going hunting,

To find it if I can.

But it might be just an arrow,

To still some other plan.

(chorus)

Hidden meanings and love's strange ways

Keep me looking for more and more,

But all I find is that behind

Each new door is another door.

Reminder to self for future episode:

Members work like ants, sawing, nailing, and singing church songs while Jeremiah walks around, not doing any work, but encouraging the others and preaching. (“I want you to hammer out racism. I want you to hammer out addictions. I want you to hammer out all that is wrong with the world!”)

APPENDIX D: FUTURE EPISODE IDEAS

A Story:

- Brenda shown evidence of Jeremiah's cheating
- Brianna arrives
- Sam attempts to overthrow Jeremiah
- Search parties for defectors (cheating couple)
- Sarah seduces Jeremiah

B Story:

- Jackie returns to the church
- Sonya's blackmail
- IRS investigates tax loopholes
- Death of James' mother
- Inner circle member tries to commit suicide
- Sandy's double spying is discovered
- Sam hits on another man-denies it
- Alice is forced to give up information for protection crew to go after her sister

C Story:

- Interview & splice footage of politicians & healings
- Mary is told that it is John's place to be the next leader
- Sunshine admits to Nevada of the abuse in her home
- Gregory and Josie fall in love

APPENDIX E: PILOT BIBLE (FINAL DRAFT)

Season starts: April 1971

James Family Back Story

Jeremiah was born Dec. 12th 1938 as Stanley Dale James in East Texas. (Sagittarius) His father was a traveling salesman and his mother worked in a factory so he and his brother were on their own to figure out the world. Jeremiah was an extremely sensitive child, and was more aware of cultural and political changes than most other children his age. He never followed the rules and early on tested the boundaries. His late teens and early twenties were all about experimentation. At eighteen, he tried his hand at street corner preaching, basically mimicking “tongues” and other dramatic gestures he had seen in traveling preachers. But, quickly lost interest because he couldn’t get any followers. He moved to Las Vegas and became a card-carrying communist. The communal ideals he learned from this period shaped his future sermons. During this time he met he met Brianna Sletter, a part-time stripper, part-time communist recruiter. He later fell in love with Brianna’s younger and more naive sister, Brenda-Lee.

Brenda became pregnant which forced Jeremiah and Brenda to reveal to Brianna and the rest of her family of their relationship. Nevada James was born. Communism wasn't meeting his needs. He couldn't get high enough in the hierarchy to feel any sense of power and so he rediscovered the word of God. He threw himself into the teachings with the same obsession that he took on his earlier rebellion and renamed himself "Jeremiah." Though, he quickly soured of the role of "follower" in the church and began working on procuring a more prominent role. However, his anti-establishment tendencies and ignoring of the rules did not subside. And he was quickly ostracized from the Christian church due to his attempts to take over.

The disapproval of Brenda's family mixed with Jeremiah's banishment from his church convinced Jeremiah to uproot and take the three of them back to East Texas. Jeremiah moved them to an area about 50 miles from his hometown where Jeremiah was an unknown and could tout himself as whoever he wanted. He took on a new persona, claiming to be a healer. He quickly found believers in the largely ignored younger generation and minorities. Both groups bought into his preaching of a world without racism, ageism, and capitalism. The more followers he gained, the more he became convinced that he was the only one that could lead this cause.

When Nevada was five, Jeremiah and Brenda had another daughter, Mary. Jeremiah was disappointed, because he really wanted a son to follow in his footsteps. Brenda was satisfied in life but Jeremiah wanted more. He began actively trying to recruit more members and adding “clairvoyant” sessions to impress potential followers. Even though he knew that his clairvoyance and his healings were a fraud, he felt that the ends justified the means. He had good intentions, and a positive message so a little deceit to further his good work was justifiable.

Jeremiah and Brenda had a son, John, when Nevada was seven. During this period, they relied on the kindness of followers to get by. Jeremiah used the old biblical question “Would you give a stranger a place to stay because it might be an angel testing you?”

Jeremiah was able to keep a small following but he had to preach out of backyards and fields. His lack of money and an actual church was hindering his ability to extend his message. So, he convinced a larger Christian-based ministry that he was aligned with their ideology so that they would give him a house of worship. It didn’t take him long to waver from their expectations. However, his location was tithing more money than expected and so higher members did not question his sermons.

Now Nevada is sixteen and the family has their final addition, an adopted one-year-old African-American baby named Johanna. The baby proves to his followers that he lives his message of integration. They live in a house attached to the church.

Characters

The Family:

Jeremiah Dale James: 36

Jeremiah truly believes that he can affect the world. A voracious reader, he loves historical biographies of famous leaders. The more power he gets the more he is convinced that he was destined for greatness and is in the same league as Gandhi, Napoleon, and other book-worthy figures.

He had noble, grand plans when he first started preaching. But, the power, the pills and alcohol, and his deteriorating mental condition have led to an unstable, militaristic, and dangerous individual.

Jeremiah slowly begins to think of himself as a fraud. His paranoia affects all aspects of his life, while he tries to hide his demons from his family and followers. His positive public image is his greatest obsession.

Jeremiah loves Nevada, but her rebelliousness is threatening his power and image. So, she is in many ways, his biggest enemy.

Although he has always been unfaithful to his wife, Brenda, he demands pure loyalty. His insecurities and abandonment issues (possibly stemming from his father leaving him all the time for work) cause him to be paranoid that she is not supporting him enough. He also always accuses her of cheating. There is nothing she can do to make him feel loved enough, to feel settled enough, and to feel any sense of permanency.

Jeremiah loves his oldest daughter, Nevada and treats her like a queen. However, now that she is a teenager, their relationship is getting rocky. He is paranoid that she will fall out of the safety of their religion and become a whore like the rest of the American teenagers. Although she is the first-born, it is his son, John that he expects to follow in his footsteps.

Jeremiah is charismatic. He can bed many of his female followers with a wink and a promise of heaven. He can befriend a man within the span of

rolling up his sleeves and sawing a 2x4. He secretly prides himself both in his manipulation and his business sense. He understands that his power lies in public image and so he has recently taken up greasing the wheels of publicity with money to newspapers, politicians, and charities.

Jeremiah personalizes everything. Any question of his authority is a personal attack. And any outsider that intrudes is a personal enemy. Jeremiah's world consists solely of an "us and them." If you're on his side, he can make you feel like you're the most giving, exceptional, and virtuous person in the world. But, if you misstep, he can make you feel like you are a selfish disappointment who is single-handedly causing the wrongs of the world.

Jeremiah drives an older station wagon. He tries not to be too flashy in front of his followers but has a weakness for technological toys. He looks like a cleaned-up hippie. Collared button up shirts with bell-bottoms. It's important to him that he is the best dressed of the family. He uses money as an excuse as to why they can't have new clothes, but the real reason is because he doesn't want the woman in his life to be viewed in any way but dowdy. He was a perverse hormone-filled young man and he doesn't want men that they walk by to have a single fantasy about his girls that is even a tenth as sinful as what he used to do.

Nevada James: 16

Born in Las Vegas, Nevada was raised in East Texas. She was too young to remember life before her father's conversion to religion. She is home-schooled and although a little fearful of the outside world, she is still curious about what else there is in life. She is perceptive, solitary, and dealing with hormones all by herself.

She has always looked up to her father, both because she is a "daddy's girl" but also due to the cult's adulation of him. But, as she becomes her own person, she is starting to see hypocrisy and deceit in her father. Although she is starting to lean away from her church and her family, she hasn't really figured out what to lean towards.

Nevada is starting to do the typical teenage existential questioning. But, in a climate of strict ideological views and rules, her normalness is seen as a threat to the cult. Nevada is in the process of becoming her own person but that process is in direct conflict with her parents, her religion, and her community.

Nevada has a crush on one of the cult men, Brian Ellis. But, she isn't sure what having a crush actually means. She just knows that she wants to

spend as much time in his physical presence as possible but can't seem to figure out how to talk to him. She doesn't have anyone in her life to explain to her that this is normal and so she thinks that she is a freak.

She hasn't been able to try enough things in life to have found out what she is good at. Nevada can't sing, can't cook, is pretty klutzy, and blushes easily. All the things that the church prides itself in the children (music, loyalty, and hard work) don't interest Nevada. She simply does what she's supposed to because it's easier to go with the flow. But, just because she appears to be a loyal follower doesn't mean she actually buys into any of it.

Her short stint into public school is about to change all of this. While there she will discover what boys actually feel like, that she loves Carly Simon and that making her own decisions feels good. Really good. She can't follow blindly anymore.

Brenda Lee James: 32

Brenda's sister was such a wild child that their parent's were extra-protective of Brenda. They thought that sheltering her would keep her from turning out like Brianna, but instead, it made her an easy target for

the first charismatic man that showed her any attention. She was only fifteen when she met Jeremiah and had never left her hometown, never been to a movie theatre, and never figured out what she wanted in life. She had one sexual partner before Jeremiah. He was a fellow student that preyed on her naivety and dumped her after their first night together. Jeremiah has never forgiven Brenda for this one transgression. Brenda was easy to woo because she was so jealous of all the male attention her stripper sister got, that when a man actually switched his attention from Brianna to *her*, the attention was intoxicating. It was the only time she felt equal to her sister.

Brenda went straight from living under her parent's rules to living under Jeremiah's domination so she never formed her own personality. She is simply a supporting role in Jeremiah's play. Early on, she tried to mimic other women's behaviors and looks but was verbally and a little physically abused into the role of dowdy housewife. Brenda never had a rebellious streak in her so she worked hard at the housewife role. She learned not to make eye contact with other men, not to question Jeremiah's decisions, and to faith that she was doing "God's work."

Being the woman behind such a powerful man gives Brenda a sense of importance. She doesn't need to shine as long as she is associated with

someone that is. She likes the sense of sisterhood that she has with the other members but she also isn't totally clueless that Jeremiah has strayed. She just doesn't ever want to be shown evidence. (Oohhh. I hear "episode.")

Jeremiah has always doted on Nevada. In a sick parallel to her jealousy of her sister's attention, Brenda has always felt a twinge of jealousy towards Nevada that has kept her from ever feeling a motherly connection. She instead dotes on the younger ones, who still want and need their mommy.

Brenda is addicted to soaps and secretly watches them behind Jeremiah's back on his hidden TV. The shows have all the excitement and romance that she has never experienced.

Brenda has not been allowed contact with her family for the last fourteen years; however, Brianna will be showing up in their lives, forcing Brenda to deal with the loss of her familial ties as she is informed of all she's missed.

Mary James: 11

Mary is the second oldest child of Brenda and Jeremiah. Her robotic devotion to her father and his teachings is creepy. She clearly wants to be his favorite and wants to follow in his footsteps. But, she will never succeed because she has no charisma. She will never be able to compete with Nevada as “daddy’s girl” and never be able to compete with John in learning the family business. The more she is denied the role she wants in life, the more demanding and obsessive she becomes. She has no other interests, no friends, and no insight. She has tomboyish hair and clothes. She is the kind of kid that perceptive adults assume will grow up to be a lesbian.

John James: 9

John is the third child of Brenda and Jeremiah. John has no interest in the church or his role as “heir apparent.” His day revolves around getting in trouble, getting dirty, and teasing girls. He never thinks about the consequences of his actions. Because he is the first-born son, Jeremiah tends to always make exceptions and excuses for John’s behavior, perpetuating John’s unawareness of consequences. John is a “mama’s boy.” He often hides from his father, which angers Jeremiah. Jeremiah’s attempts to force John to be a loving son just increase John’s terror.

Johanna: 1

Johanna is the youngest of the James children. African-American and adopted, she is a trophy in the fight against racism. Only being one, she spends her days pooping, crying, and spilling things. Overall, just being a complication in Brenda's daily life and a mini attention-stealer as far as Jeremiah is concerned. But, she is successful in her original purpose, proving that the James' live the messages that they preach.

Rose Anne James: 61

Rose Ann is the mother of Jeremiah and his older brother Richard. She was married to Charles James, a traveling salesman that came in and out of their lives until his death twenty years ago. Rose Ann was a tough woman, working a in a factory and wearing pants around the house as the two boys grew up. No baking, no Leave It to Beaver. No religion. Not that she was against religion, she was just busy and it didn't seem important.

Rose Ann is much prouder of Richard, a podiatrist, than she is of Jeremiah. She feels Jeremiah is throwing his life away with all this church stuff. Even as adults, she is still very detached from her children. She has her

own life. As Jeremiah becomes further delusional and the word “cult” is starting to be whispered, Rose Ann becomes more embarrassed by her son and his lifestyle.

Richard James: 42

The oldest son of Rose Ann and Charles James. He has become a successful doctor. He is also an atheist. There has always been sibling rivalry between the boys growing up and nothing has changed as adults. He considers himself the success of the family. However, Jeremiah sees him as a loser and a sell-out, not fulfilling his full potential. But, Richard sees success more in terms of money than power. His issues with his brother would cause the two to easily lose contact if it wasn't for Richard's wife.

Leslie James: 38

Leslie is married to Richard James. She grew up in an upper middle-class protestant home where she was expected to marry a doctor or lawyer. She drives her Cadillac as if she was born in it. They live in Richard's

hometown where she dutifully works at moving her family up the class ladder through charity work and martini gossip.

Even though her station in life makes her seem like she would be a self-absorbed snob, she actually has a good heart. She pushes Richard to keep in better contact with his brother and is often forcing family get-togethers. Mainly because she feels bad for Brenda and always thinks that she can make a difference by spending time with her and giving her some contact with a woman outside of the church. Leslie wants Brenda to stand up to Jeremiah, wear make-up, and be a more independent woman. (Brenda thinks she's a hypocrite considering Leslie doesn't have a job and plays the role of housewife too, albeit, in big earrings.)

Ginny and Genny James: 8

Ginny and Genny are twins born to Leslie and Richard James. They were planned and everything in their lives since has been planned. From piano lessons to play-dates, they are "designer" children. They hate visiting with Jeremiah's offspring because the church kids seem weird. Mary is always sitting them down and lecturing them, and John is always throwing dirt at them or kissing them.

Brianna Sletter: 36

Brianna was a walking cliché in high school. She dropped out her junior year and took up stripping. It was at work that she met Jeremiah. And dating a client didn't seem like a bad idea. She didn't really care when she found out that Brenda was pregnant with her boyfriend's baby because she wasn't in love with him anyway. The only thing she was pissed about was "losing" to her sister, even if it was just that once. Her looks faded faster than she expected and she's spent the last ten years hopping between wrinkly sugar daddies.

No matter how old she gets, Brianna needs to prove herself through her ability to attract and control men. When she comes back into the James world, she tests her manipulative powers on Jeremiah. (That'll be interesting, the two most manipulative characters in a battle of sexual wills.)

Brianna wears her sexuality on her sleeve. Well, in actuality, she's usually sleeveless. And strapless.

She has also given up on Communism and now believes very strongly in God. She actually prays every night. But, she believes in the angel with a harp on a cloud type of Christianity. As long as she believes and asks for forgiveness, she doesn't see anything wrong with the choices she makes or the lifestyle she lives.

Jeremiah's Enemies

Bill Renaldson: 33 (minor threat)

Bill is a local journalist after numerous letters from concerned family members; Bill decides to start investigating People's Peace. The more threats he gets and the more he suspects that his bosses or co-workers have been corrupted, the more determined he is to find the truth.

Bill lives alone, married to his job. However, he eventually fears for his life and even a good story isn't worth death to him. Self-preservation causes him to back away from the story right when it was most important for the truth to be told. He will have to live with that decision and the devastation attached to it for the rest of his lonely life.

Mayor Grennel: 62 (medium threat)

A true politician, all decisions are based on what will keep him elected. Though Reverend James offers votes, it's not enough to counteract the votes he would lose from supporting "the hippies."

When Reverend James mistakenly marries off an underage white girl to an adult black man, it gives the Mayor a target and a way of getting into the news. A mix of his own bigotry and feeding into the pervasive racism of his constituents, Grennel is determined to use the age technicality as a way of bringing down People's Peace. He truly feels he is protecting society and the vulnerable youth from exploitation.

Sonya Abrams: 24 (major threat)

Sonya, an early ex-member of Jeremiah's original following was sleeping with Jeremiah for two years. Her parents brought her up in the church and when she was old enough to seduce, she tried her newfound power out on Jeremiah with positive results. After she fell in love with a guy her own age, she left the church and has since been blackmailing Jeremiah. The more power he gains, the more power she gains. She knows that she is playing with fire, and recognizes his increasing unstableness, but she just

can't give up the mix of easy money and the feeling of power over someone already so powerful.

The Truth Seekers (biggest threat)

The Truth Seekers is a mix of defectors and family members that feel they've lost their loved ones to the church. They keep pressure on news outlets and government agencies to look into the practices of the church. Jeremiah is in an all out war with this group.

The face of the group is Sue Stevens, 32. She is an ex-member that left the church when the hypocrisy became too much. She is now dedicated to liberating her sister, Alice, from the church, *by any means necessary*.

Jackie Hunt: 43

Jackie was once a loyal follower of Jeremiah. She even tithed away all her assets, including her house because she believed in the church. However, when her mom had a stroke, she begged the church to return her home so that she would have a place to care for her mother. When Jeremiah

refused, she left the church and spilled secrets to Sue and the other Truth Seekers.

People's Peace Members

Samuel Lotus: 37

Samuel has been Jeremiah's right hand man for the last five years. However, he has many personality traits similar to Jeremiah and it is clear that he is getting impatient in his role as number two within the church. He eventually makes a play to usurp Jeremiah (you'll have to wait and see the episode to find out if he succeeds!).

Samuel has no children and no partner. He is married to the church. He has homosexual tendencies that he tries to keep hidden even though the church is open to all sexual persuasions.

Samuel makes a lot of people feel uncomfortable. He stares a little too long, often has awkward pauses in conversation, and has no sense of humor. It is exhausting trying to talk to him, so most people don't.

Sam is in charge of the “Protection Crew” and is supposed to spy on ex-members and enemies of the church, but he quickly uses his power to spy on loyal followers also. His personality mixed with Jeremiah’s paranoia eventually deteriorates the church’s atmosphere into a militaristic and suspicious mess.

Joined: because the church is a hierarchy he can find power in.

Alice Stevens: 32

Alice had always been the rebellious one of the family. So, when People’s Peace stepped in and cleaned up her drug habit, the family was thrilled. So thrilled, in fact, that her sister, Sue, also decided to join. It seems Alice was drained of both her drug addiction and her rebelliousness. Now, she is one of the most loyal members. So loyal it’s as if none of her original personality survived the cleansing.

It was this change in Alice that first set off warning bells for Sue. Sue recognized that Alice had completely lost herself to the church. So, Sue decided to leave before any more damage could be done. But, it wasn’t soon enough. Alice did not follow.

Alice is Brenda's confidante. It is around Brenda that bits of Alice's old personality surface as the two gossip and joke. Brenda is Alice's surrogate sister.

Alice stays deep within the church, avoiding public events where her sister could easily find her.

Joined: because the church saved her life.

Brian Ellis: 20

Brian is a tall and muscular African-American man that exudes sexiness. He has a sloppy smile that makes you want to pat him on the head but it belies his confidence and intrigue. Brian also came through the Drug Rehab program. He found a world full of good-hearted people. Being a part of it made him feel like a good-hearted person, too. But, the hormones of a man his age usually trump good deeds.

He crushes easily and is the subject of many crushes. He is known as "heartthrob" around the congregation. Though he is trying to be loyal to his girlfriend, Caitlyn, he isn't clueless when it comes to Nevada's interest.

Though he may have a bad boy streak, he knows crossing the lines with the Reverend's daughter would not be a good idea. But flirting can't be that bad, right?

Josie Bilts: 67

A hefty African-American lady that has lived through enough to know that America needs to change, yet, still optimistic enough to believe that it can. She is always at the front of the marches and the loudest singer. She loves canning. You can't stop by for a visit without leaving with a jar of pickles. Her Pecan cookies are famous amongst the congregation. She constantly writes letters home trying to convince her sister to move there and join the church. (A decision she will regret after the suicides).

Joined: because it was an integrated church with lively services.

Gregory Dengers: 62

A lanky African-American that lives in the apartments/commune with them but isn't quite a follower. He is a jack-of-all-trades that Jeremiah traded room and board for maintenance services years ago. They often try and get Gregory to join in activities but he usually hangs out on the fringe

of church services. He believes in God and thinks that Jeremiah is a wonderful man, but he doesn't buy into the idea of Jeremiah having the powers he claims. Gregory considers himself a ladies man and hits on all women over the age of 40.

The excitement of building a Utopia, where his handy-man services would be appreciated, seduces him into the church's fold.

Caitlyn Booth: 15

Caitlyn, capricious and in love, considers herself loyal to the church, as long as it doesn't inhibit whatever it is that she wants to do. When she decides that she wants to marry her fiancé, she never thinks of the consequences that her forging a birth certificate might have on her church. She never befriends Nevada because she thinks of herself as too mature. She much rather hang out with young adults.

Joined: because her boyfriend is a member.

Justine Breakell: 33

A loyal follower and lawyer. She left business law because she wanted to do more good in the world. She found People's Peace in a newspaper article about their volunteer work and decided to find out more. She quickly realized that this was the perfect "family" for her, surrounded by good-hearted people instead of money-hungry businessmen. She now acts as the church's official lawyer. But, her real passion is being involved in every volunteer group they create. Having seen the worst in humanity, she needs her fellow members as a way to remember the good in people.

Joined: as an outlet to volunteer.

Nevada's Friends

Sunshine Baker: 16

Sunshine is a true hippie. Peace, love, drugs, and Carly Simon. She meets Nevada in public school. Sunshine finds life so fascinating that she instantly wants to un-shelter Nevada so Nevada can see how wonderful the world is. Sunshine knows about the racism, nuclear weapons, corrupt government, etc. around her, but she chooses to ignore these things and instead enjoy each day. Of course, she isn't just an optimistic hedonist.

Although it seems like she is running towards life, her behavior thinly covers the fact that she is running away from her home life.

Donald Leon: 18

Donald, that stoner boy whose a little too much trouble to be popular, but not enough of a bad ass to have a reputation. He is pessimistic in the world and doesn't bother following current events because "nothing's going to change." Same reason why there's no point in believing in God. He has a slanted smile, and although cute, he definitely isn't a heartbreaker.

Although Nevada is just naïve enough to get hurt by him even if he doesn't try, Donald finds her kind of weird. But, it's that weirdness that piques his curiosity long enough for them to connect.

Sarah Cornwell: 16

Sarah comes from a single-family household. Her mother joined the church when Sarah was five. So, she has always been sheltered from the outside world. Though she likes to talk about boys and rebellion, she would never be able to handle life outside the church. This is all she knows so she has to find ways within the walls of this religious world to act out her teenage desires.

Just as we all get crushes on our teachers, Sarah has a huge crush on the Reverend. Her attempts at seduction eventually work, causing her to be caught between her sheltered immaturity and the role of mistress to the most powerful man she knows.

Theme

Society seems shocked when televangelists hire male hookers, right-wing radio hosts pop pills, and GOP candidates fall in love with little boys. Even though we all know that our idols are fallible, we still insist on their perfection and buy into their vision. It is important, as a culture, to not worship a fellow man. As the bumper sticker says, Power Corrupts, Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely.” And the fallout of this environment is tragedy for the leader, the family, the followers, and those that loved them.

Too often, people rely on the line “Don’t Drink the Punch” for comedy, but don’t take the time to consider what persuades a person to actually take that sip. The people in cults tend never to be mentioned until they are in a list of dead on the evening news. This series allows the viewer to get to know the people that live by a different set of rules than the rest of society. Some of these rules are admirable and some of these rules are

questionable. But, the people that make up a cult's following are fascinating. Some are dedicated to a Cause, some are looking for acceptance, and some feel they've found the Truth, some see no way out. No matter their reasons for joining, they look to the future, too. But, they see a different outcome than what we, the outsiders, predict.

Locations

Austin's Outskirts

James' House: A wooden structure attached to the church. It's roomy enough for the family but stripped of any ostentation. The décor is dowdy as a reminder to followers that the family practices what they preach. The dining room is the heart of the home. This is where the entire family sits down for dinner, together, every night.

Church: Looks like a typical Christian church with stained glass windows and long, wooden pews. But, the traditional look belies the communist-leaning politics of the leader. The side houses Jeremiah's office. The backyard boasts a BBQ and a large backyard for all the church functions.

Animal Sanctuary: A pride of the church, it has many outside dog runs that are always full. It is a no-kill shelter and never turns away an animal.

Soup Kitchen: The soup kitchen is actually in the city and is not officially owned by the church. But, the church members staff it and often use an extended van to get to their shifts. The long tables full of vagrants make great photo ops for the church.

Rehab Center: Brenda, a registered nurse, established the rehab center. This aspect of the church attracts many new members both from ex-druggies that owe their life to People's Peace and to good-hearted medical workers that see this as their calling in life. The center can house up to 18 patients at a time. All one floor, it centers around the medicine door and lounge room.

Resale Store: Hodge-podge type store. One could get buried under the piles of antiques, furniture, and knick-knacks that have been tithed to the church for resale.

Mexico:

Paradise City: Currently just a field surrounding a Tupelo Gum Tree. Over the course of the season, Paradise City will emerge complete with a meeting Pavilion, a classroom, a Doctor's cottage, barns full of bunk beds, and a house for the James family.

Structure

Episode: Each episode would be approximately 60 minutes long, comprised of a teaser and four acts.

Teaser: Each teaser reveals a little more detail of the original mass suicide. Whether it's a face, a piece of jewelry, or other personal item, a new "victim" will always be revealed. This will increase tension in two ways. First, as the season progresses the viewer will worry about characters that they care about and hope that the individual isn't in a future teaser. Secondly, characters that have been shown as part of the suicide will be watched even more carefully as the viewer wonders how they ended up with that fate.

Tone

“Six Feet Under” finds God.

Set in 1971, the tone is punctuated by the turbulence of that period. The show should be as accurate as possible to establish realism. This truthfulness should permeate character, plausibility, and historical fact.

Loyalty to realistic portrayals of the language, sexuality, and violence of the period lends itself to cable.

Season One Arc

Nevada:

Nevada begins her journey with the seeds of rebellion planted but her father seems to think that he has successfully quashed any defiant tendencies. Nevada may appear to give in to her father’s demands but by the end of the season she will be publicly revolting.

Brenda:

Brenda has always turned a blind eye to her husband's infidelity and his demands that affect her quality of life. But, when she discovers her husband in bed with another woman, she can't pretend she didn't see. Even worse, the woman was a young friend of Nevada. Brenda used to avoid the women and control the pill dosages but by the end of the season she has lost her control over both and also lost any love she had for Jeremiah. Though, she will continue to play the role of attentive wife for the public.

Jeremiah:

Jeremiah loves Nevada, but her rebelliousness is threatening his power and image. So, she is in many ways, his biggest enemy. He begins the season at the height of power but his family's unraveling, the transgressions of his followers and the outside pressures from government and defectors have fueled his instability. By the end of the season, he will be clinging tightest to his power, unaware that it is this desperation that causes him to lose control.

Sam:

Sam begins the season as Jeremiah's sidekick. Sam and Jeremiah see the world through similar eyes but that also leads to Sam's similar need for

power. He attempts a coup and fails. But, the attempted overthrow leaves an irreparable division in the church.

People's Peace:

The congregation's heart has always been in the right place. The members dedicate themselves to good works and good camaraderie. But, the movement is reaching its breaking point under the stresses of a power-hungry leader, an intolerable society and a racially charged era. By the end of the season, some followers will have to go against their church "family, some will have to give up everything to stay loyal, and some will be dead.

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VITA

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